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In a letter to the Texas Railroad Commission, U.S. EPA heaped plaudits on the commission's plan to regulate drilling waste disposal in response to increasing reports of earthquakes.

"The proposed regulations were reviewed by multiple Ground Water/Underground Injection Control program engineers and scientists," William Honker, who directs the water quality division in Dallas-based EPA Region 6, wrote to the commission during the commenting period on its proposal. "All applauded the RRC's efforts to ensure it has sufficient regulatory authority to respond to any event of the type where concerns may arise."

Members of the two agencies "don't always see eye to eye on policy," said Milton Rister, executive director of the Railroad Commission, "but at the staff level, we're engaged on day-to-day operations, specific instances and working together to try to make sure we're doing what's best for the people of Texas."

Drillers would be required to accompany disposal well permit applications with items like regional earthquake-risk data. The proposal also strengthens the commission's authority to stop injections at a particular well.

As the doling out of disposal well permits has increased, so too has the number of earthquakes: Last year, the commission gave out twice the number of permits that it did four years prior. Dozens of quakes with a magnitude of at least 2.0 occurred in the Barnett Shale since last November, according to federal numbers.

It's a rare moment of harmony for the agencies, which have most recently butted heads over proposed federal regulation to curb carbon emissions. This issue isn't new, either: When a Fort Worth driller was accused of contaminating one neighborhood's water supply, EPA and the commission weighed in with differing viewpoints. Elizabeth Ames Jones, commissioner at the time, said, "We'll see which is the real protection agency, and I'd say it's the Railroad Commission of Texas" (Jim Malewitz, [*Texas Tribune*](#), Sept. 23). -- **AI**